Springhill Presbyterian Church

A History of Springhill

1825 - 2025

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(Cover picture by Lydia Moore)

A History of Springhill

The first settlers in Decatur County were the families of John Fugit, for whom this township was named, and Griffy Griffiths and Elias Jarrett. They had left their homes in Franklin County and settled near the present town of Clarksburg in March, 1819.

No doubt they followed the road running from Buena Vista to Clarksburg, an old Indian trail. It would have been the natural and easiest way to find their way through the thickly wooded area.

Prior to the Treaty of St. Mary's in 1819 all of eastern and central Indiana was held by the Delaware Indians, a large and warlike tribe. Although they used this area as a hunting ground, they had never settled here.

At this time, except for a few straggling settlements in Wayne and Franklin Counties, and along the Ohio and lower Wabash Rivers, Indiana was a wild and unknown territory.

In 1820 the New Purchase was surveyed, a land office was opened at Brookville, and immigration to this part of Indiana increased.

At the end of the War of 1812, several soldiers who were returning to their homes in Kentucky had camped for the night near the present site of this church. They liked what they saw and later returned with their families and settled here.

Sixteen soldiers had been sent from the Army along the Ohio River with a message to Commodore Perry on Lake Erie. After the great naval battle which ended the War was won, they sold the horses which had been given them when they were demobilized and walked home to Kentucky from Lake Erie. Eight veterans of that War are buried in the Springhill Cemetery.

The first settlers came from Kentucky in the Fall of 1820. They were Alexander Logan and Joseph and Andrew Rankin. During the next year James Logan, Joseph Henderson, Adam Rankin, Martin Logna, and perhaps others, came. In 1822 many other families came including John Anderson, Thomas Meek, and others.

The first school was held in an empty log cabin on the farm now owned by Mr. and Mrs. Max Barnett. It probably opened in 1825 since its teacher, Thomas Meek, had come from Kentucky in 1822. He had previously taught school twenty years in Kentucky. He was also the assessor for Springhill.

In 1835 a district school was built on the farm of Adam Rankin, south of the church. Later rebuilt and enlarged, it was used until a two story brick building was built during the early Civil War period. This building burned in 1894 and was replaced by a one-story brick structure. It is now the home of Mr. and Mrs. Donald Martin. The Springhill School was closed in 1918.

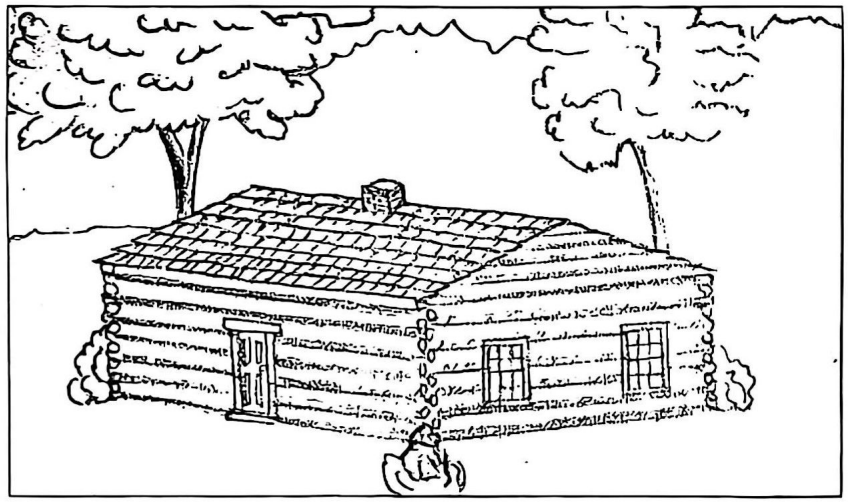
The first store of any importance in Decatur County was opened here in 1824 by James Conwell of Franklin County. Martin Benson was in charge of the store. Other businesses soon followed.

A corn cracker, driven by horse power, was operated by Nathan Lewis early in the twenties. Later he converted it to a bark grindery, grinding slippery elm, sassafras, and dogwood bark for the Eastern markets.

Edward Jackman installed the first carding machine for the preparation of locally grown wool and flax which was then spun and woven into clothing by the women.

William Henderson operated a grist mill, a carding machine, and a distillery a short distance east of Springhill. It was said that he found a ready market for all his products.

Jerry Dugan later ran a sawmill on Clifty Creek on the road running east of the Church. The creek was dammed for sawmill power. The ridge south of the creek was covered with a heavy stand of hardwood and tulip poplars. There was also a gravel pit near the sawmill.



Beginning in 1821, itinerant preachers from Illinois, Kentucky and Ohio preached in the cabins of the settlers until a church could be built. The first church building, thirty feet square, was of hewed logs and was erected by the men of the Church. The walls were put up in the Fall and Winter of 1824. The roof was not put on until the following Spring or Summer. The rafters were made of poles, the lath split and shaved. The shingles were made on the farm now owned by William Logan.

Each family provided its own pew--not of uniform design--"some better, some worse". Doors were added to the pews, when needed, to keep the children in bounds. On these pews worshippers sat for a two-hour service in the morning. Then, after an interval of thirty minutes to an hour, sat for another service lasting an hour in the afternoon.

The log church stood just north of the present church. It was put to immediate use. A frame addition was added in 1832.

According to the minutes of the first Session meeting, dated July 30, 1825, "A committee of Presbytery, consisting of John Foster and William Caldwell, met with Thomas Henry, Sr., an ordained elder, and constituted a Session with Rev. David McDill, D.D., moderator. William Hood and Nathaniel Patton, Sr., elders elect, being examined and their examinations sustained, were ordained to the office of ruling elders in the New Zion Congregation."

Several members of the new church, before coming to Indiana, had been members of the Zion Congregation, an Associate Reformed Church at Lexington, Kentucky. The new church was named in its honor.

We sometimes wonder why these people would leave their homes near Lexington to come to this rough, unsettled area to start all over again. The chief reasons were cheap land and a hatred of the institution of slavery.

In Kentucky land sold for $25.00 per acre. Here it could be bought for $2.00. But the over-riding reason was slavery. Kentucky was a slave state--Indiana a free state. Many families came to remove their children from the blighting influence of slavery. Anti-slavery sentiment was strong in Springhill. The early history of this area abounds with stories of the Underground Railroad which had a station near Clarksburg.

Runaway slaves would cross the Ohio River at one of six or eight points, would be hidden by day and conducted by night until they reached the home of a "good Quaker" in Union County, and then to

Canada and freedom. It was a dangerous business. The fleeing blacks were often pursued by their legal owners and by slave catchers or bounty-hunters who hoped to sell them back into slavery.

In one well-known instance a mother and two small children were hidden in a shed on the Samuel Donnell farm a short distance west of this Church. While many people of this area favored the institution of slavery, a slight majority opposed it vigorously and contributed greatly to its final overthrow.

In the early days of the Church only the Psalms (from the book of Psalms) sung to appropriate tunes were used. No instrumental music was permitted in the church for many years.

Those who attended the Preparatory Service on the Friday night preceding the Communion Sabbath were given small tokens. Unless these were presented at the communion service, that person could not join in the service.

No church member could belong to any secret order or lodge. After one man had been received into the membership of the Church, it was learned he was a member of a secret order. When called before the Session he stated he had not known of this rule and offered to withdraw from the Church. With the Session's permission, he did withdraw.

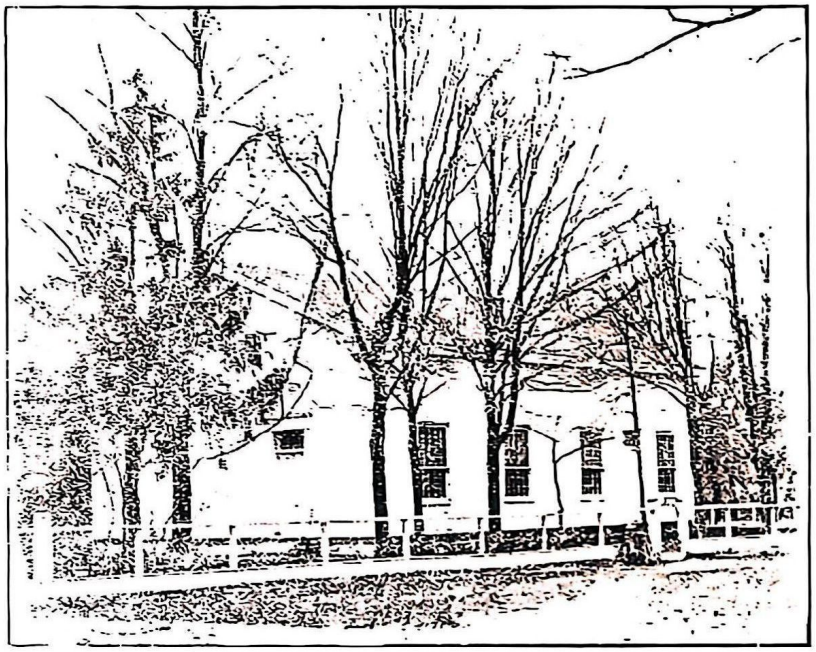
It was not easy to transfer membership to another congregation. Those living within the environs of a church were expected to attend that church. One member living between Springhill and Richland wanted to transfer to Richland because more rail fences had to be opened to reach Springhill. However, the Session felt this was not sufficient reason, and he continued on the Springhill membership roll.

Serious quarrels or disagreements between members of the congregation were often mediated and settled by the minister and Session, apparently to the satisfaction of all parties.

Those suspected or accused of dishonesty, drunkenness, lying or other misconduct or immorality were called before the Session. If, as was usually the case, they confessed their sin, said they were sorry, and promised to reform, they could continue as members. Sometimes, due to time required for a committee of Session to complete its investigation, these cases would continue for several months. During this time the accused could, and usually did, attend services; although they could not participate in communion.

The log Church was served by visiting ministers until the first settled minister, the Rev. James Worth, came in 1830. He was married later in the year. He had studied Theology at Allegheny Theological Seminary, and was ordained here. He remained here twenty-two years until 1852 when he, his wife, his six grown children with their families, two elders from this Church and many other members joined a covered wagon train which crossed the plains to Oregon. He ministered there until his death in 1881.

In 1841 a frame church was built just south of the log church. It was remodeled in 1855.



1841 – 1893

The Church was called New Zion until 1872 when it was decided to call it Springhill, since that was the name of the post office which had been established November 6, 1827. In 1830 a mail route was started, running in a generally westerly direction from Brookville by way of Duck Creek Crossing (Metamora), Stipps Hill, Springhill, Greensburgh, Adams, Moreen, Flat Rock, Newbern, Columbus, Bloomington, and Mount Tabor to Spencer. At the same time a route ran from Indianapolis to Brookville through Rushville, New Salem, Andersonville, Somerset (Laurel), and Duck Creek Crossing (Metamora). The mail was carried in the saddle bags of a horseback rider.

The first Springhill Post Office was at Bryson's store. John Bryson was the first postmaster followed by William Anderson, who was Clerk of the Session 40 years, Hugh Bryson, Thomas Trusler, James Sands and Mary Mitchell. The Post Office was discontinued December 30, 1901.

The Rev. Joseph R. Walker, a native of Ireland, was installed in 1852, remaining fifteen years. He, too, had attended Allegheny Theological Seminary. Rev. Walker married a daughter of the congregation, Miss Cassandra Donnell, daughter of Thomas Donnell, in whose home he boarded.

During his pastorate, an early missionary to Egypt, home on furlough, was to preach here one Sunday afternoon and the Richland congregation was invited to hear him. Rev. Walker was to preach at Clarksburg at the same hour. When he returned from preaching his sermon there, he found the meeting here still going on. He entered the Church by the side door, mounted the pulpit, jerked the Doctor's coat-tail vigorously, and said, "Sit down. You've preached long enough." When he was ignored he raised his arms, pronounced the benediction, and dismissed the congregation. A popular and energetic minister, Rev. Walker later became a teacher of languages in the Greensburg High School when it began in 1869.

In May, 1858, the Associate Presbyterian Church, often called the Seceder Church, united with the Associate Reformed Church to form the United Presbyterian Church. This church then became the Springhill United Presbyterian Church.

One year later, April 18, 1859, Indiana Presbytery of the United Presbyterian Church was organized here during the ministry of Rev. Joseph Walker.

The Rev. Samuel Taggart was installed in May, 1868. Because of poor health, he left in November of the same year.

After an interval of two years when the Church was without a minister, the Rev. William Johnson came in 1871, remaining until 1876. He was a public-spirited man, a worker for moral and social reform, and was an interesting and forceful speaker.

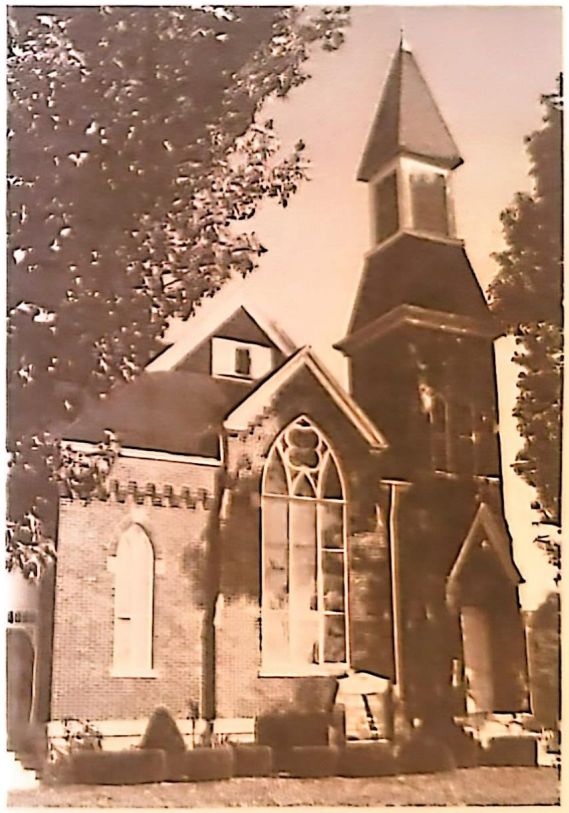
The Rev. William Richie became the pastor in 1877, remaining two years. He, too, was a reformer, particularly interested in the temperance movement.

The Rev. Alvin Stuart Vincent came in 1880 and served until 1888. He was greatly beloved as a pastor, and was an able preacher. During his ministry the church membership was 140. Previously it had reached 180.

This Church was the parent church of the Milroy and Richland United Presbyterian Churches. The Milroy Church organized in 1835 was first called Flat Rock afterward Bethesda, now Milroy. The Richland Church, no longer in existence, was organized in 1859.

In the Spring of 1890 the Rev. T.H. McMichael, a graduate of Xenia Seminary and recently married, came to Springhill. He was here until 1892. In 1903 he became President of Monmouth College. Several members of this congregation attended Monmouth through the years. Springhill was often visited by the men's and women's glee clubs from Monmouth. Dr. McMichael often came to Springhill when traveling in the interest of the college, and always found generous financial support here.

It was during his ministry that the organ was first used, despite strong opposition from some of the more conservative members of the congregation who believed instrumental music should not be used in worship services.



1893 - 2025

The present brick structure was erected during his ministry. The building committee visited a new United Presbyterian Church in Bellefontaine, Ohio, liked it, and came home and built one like it at Springhill.

The old frame church was moved several rods east, and services were held there during construction of the new building. Upon completion of the brick church, the old frame church was sold to a Methodist Church in Laurel where it was set up just as it was here with the same pulpit, pews and chandeliers.

On November 26, 1893, Dr. McMichael came back and preached the sermon dedicating the new church.

The first minister to serve in the new church was the Rev. H.H. Crawford, who also came directly from seminary with his new bride. He was formally installed on Monday, the next day after the dedication of the new church.

He was followed in 1896 by the Rev. Paul Stewart who was here until 1900.

The Rev. Neil Ferguson came that same year. He was here about four years.

From 1906 to 1913 the Rev. W.W. McCall was pastor. His sister, Martha, married Robert Scott of this congregation. Their first child, Marshall, was to become moderator of General Assembly and President of McCormick Theological Seminary in Chicago.

The Rev. Fred Elliott came in 1913 and was here until 1918. A forceful preacher, he was active in the social life of the community. He left in 1921.

The Rev. J.H. McCann was minister from 1921 to 1929. During his stay the custom of giving showers for newly-married couples and the annual observance of Memorial Day began.

In 1925 the centennial of the Church was celebrated with a three-day program. Responses to the address of welcome by the Rev. McCann were given by the sons of the congregation who had become ministers--the Rev. W.W. Logan and the Rev. Frank Hood, and by ministers who had married daughters of the church--the Rev. E.E. Evans, the Rev. F.W. Schmunk, the Rev. W.W. McCall, and the Rev. James Lytle. A letter of greeting from Dr. J.A. Thompson, President of Tarkio College, was read. Regret was expressed that Dr. Lora M. Henry, another son of the congregation, a pioneer medical missionary in Egypt and the founder of Assiut Hospital, could not be present.

A special feature of the program was the planting of an evergreen tree on the site of the log church by two ministers who had grown up in the congregation.

A very interesting account of the first hundred years of the Church was read by Miss Edith Patton, great-granddaughter of Nathaniel Patton, a charter member of the Church and first clerk of the Session.

The Rev. W.W. McCall spoke during the Bible School hour. President T.H. McMichael of Monmouth College preached during the morning service to one of the largest audiences ever assembled in the Church. The Rev. Fred Elliott spoke at the evening service.

When the interior of the Church was damaged by smoke from the furnace in 1930, services were held in the Clarksburg School Building. The Rev. W.W. Woodburn preached his trial sermon there and came as pastor that Spring.

The present brick parsonage, replacing an old frame one built in 1872, was built that summer. The Woodburns lived in Clarksburg until its completion. The Rev. Woodburn resigned in 1935 because of illness. Wanting to preach a farewell sermon, he was brought into the Church in his wheel chair and preached a sermon still remembered by many of those present.

The Rev. Robert W. Smith came with his bride, and was ordained as a minister here in 1935. He left in 1942.

He was followed by the Rev. D.L. McBride who served from 1942 to 1947.

The Rev. H. Vincent Wright began his pastorate here in 1947, leaving in 1949.

The Rev. Ross W. Copeland began his ministry here in September, 1949, and was here until September, 1954.

The Rev. Milton Boos was here from November, 1955, to January, 1959.

In 1958, the United Presbyterian Church which had been organized just one hundred years before, and the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America, founded in 1706, merged to form the United Presbyterian Church in the United States of America with offices in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Springhill then became a member of this organization.

July 10, 1960, Mr. Donald M. Brower was ordained into the ministry here and installed as our minister. He and Mrs. Brower had recently completed their studies at McCormick Seminary. They were here until October, 1962.

The cross in the front of the sanctuary was dedicated March 10, 1963. Mr. Brower returned to conduct the service of dedication. The cross was carved by Mr. Frank Marlin of Greensburg from native walnut furnished by Elder Frank Beall of this congregation. Mr Marlin did extensive research in the design of early crosses, and the carving of this cross conforms in significance and meaning to those of antiquity.

In June, 1963, the congregations of the Kingston and Springhill churches entered into an agreement to form a parish for the purpose of sharing a minister, because of a severe shortage of ministers willing to serve local congregations.

In July, 1964, the Rev. Stanley L Ray accepted the call of the two congregations and remained until November, 1968.

The Rev. Herbert P. Townsend came to serve the two churches in September, 1969 and was here til January, 1975.

Our additional ministers have been: Rev. Mason Shambach from 1976 – 1982; Rev. Lloyd Dunavant from 1983 – 1986; Rev. Jeffrey Carney 1988 – 1993; Rev. Owen Butt (from Australia) 1993-1994; Rev. Robert Eversull 1994-1995; David Crowley 1995-2011; and Rev. Shannon Burford 2011-2024.

Always self supporting, the Springhill congregation has never called on Presbytery for financial aid. We can justifiably take pride in its history. Its' influence in the lives of its' members and ministers, going out all over the county and in foreign lands, must have been considerable.

And it all began in a little log church built 200 years ago, dedicated to the service of God and the betterment of mankind.

MINISTERS

Rev. James Worth	1830-1852
Rev. Joseph Walker	1852-1867
Rev. S. A. Taggart	May-Nov. 1868
Rev. William Johnston	1871-1876
Rev. William M. Richie	1877-1879
Rev. Alvan S. Vincent	1880-1888
Rev. Thomas J. McMichael	1890-1892
Rev. Harry H. Crawford	1893-1895
Rev. Paul Stewart	1896-1900
Rev. Neil Ferguson	1901-1905
Rev. William W. McCall	1906-1913
Rev. Frederick Elliott	1913-1918
Rev. James S. E. McMichael	1918-1921
Rev. J. Harvey McCann	1921-1929
Rev. W. W. Woodburn	1930-1935
Rev. W. Robert Smith	1935-1942
Rev. D. L. McBride	1943-1947
Rev. H. Vincent Wright	1947-1949
Rev. Ross W. Copeland	1949-1954
Rev. Milton Boos	1955-1959
Fredrick Samms (student supply)	1959-1960
Rev. Donald M. Brower	1960-1962
Rev. Stanley I. Ray	1964-1968
Rev. Herbert P. Townsend Jr.	1969-1975
Rev. Mason Shambach	1976-1982
Rev. Lloyd Dunavant	1983-1986
Rev. Jeffery Carney	1988-1993
Rev. Owen Butt (Interim)	1993-1994

Ministers (cont'd)

Rev. Robert Eversull (interim)	1994-1995
Rev. David Crowley	1995-2011
Rev. Shannon Burford	2011-2024

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